

# Bill Cochran

## Indiana State Representative, District 72



Summer, 2001

Dear Friends:

The 2001 long session of the Indiana General Assembly has ended with the passage of a new state budget and several other important pieces of legislation. I am pleased we completed our work on time in a bipartisan manner.

The new two-year state budget includes increased funding for education, CHOICE and other important programs while avoiding a general tax increase. The budget also includes funding for several important local projects that are detailed inside this newsletter.

We passed several other laws that will benefit our state in a variety of areas, including health care, education, crime, election reform and environmental protection. We made improvements to our license branch operations and passed legislation that will protect consumers from annoying telephone calls with the establishment of a do-not-call list. I have described many of these new laws in the next few pages.

In addition, you will find a map of our new legislative district. We are required to redraw the district boundaries every 10 years due to population shifts. I welcome those of you who are new to the district and look forward to working with you in the coming months to make Indiana a better place to live.

Please contact my office if you have additional concerns or questions about state government. You may e-mail me at [H72@ai.org](mailto:H72@ai.org) or call toll-free at 1-800-382-9842.

Sincerely,

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# New budget increases school support, local development

Going into the 2001 legislative session, many observers felt that a sluggish economy would make it difficult to enact a biennial state budget without either passing a general tax increase or cutting funding for critical areas like public education. However, the budget bill that became law continues our record of avoiding general tax increases, while providing additional state support to our schools, health care and local projects.

The final version of House Enrolled Act 1001 enables the state to increase support for public schools across Indiana by an average of 3.5 percent each of the next two fiscal years, with minimum guarantees built in to help schools avoid cutting programs and personnel. Funding for higher education was increased by an average of 3.2 percent each year.

## Services and local development

The budget includes additional funding for the CHOICE program that provides in-home care services for the elderly and disabled, as well as Build Indiana Fund support for research and technology, community wastewater and drinking water grants, airport development and improvements to voting systems.

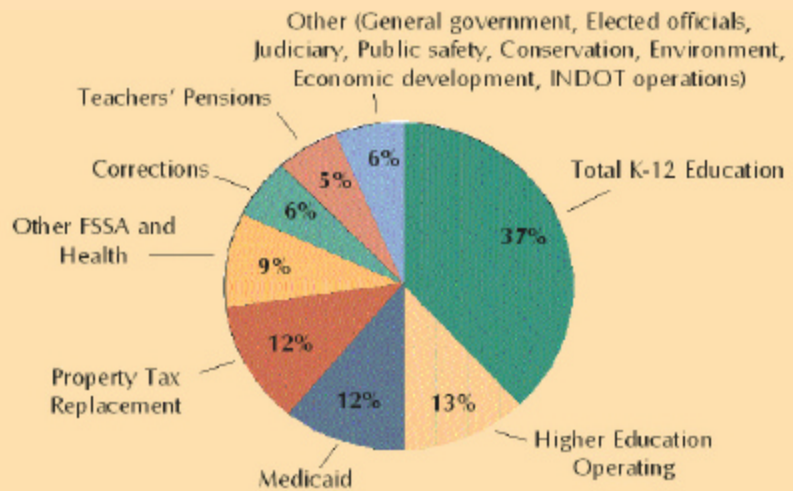
## Tax relief

It was disappointing that we were unable to provide the levels of tax relief that were included in past state budgets, but I am pleased that we were able to extend the life of the homestead credit at 10 percent and maintain the earned income tax credit that assists working families on lower incomes.

Businesses and farms will receive an income tax credit on personal property beginning in 2003, and mobile homes have been changed to be treated as real property with similar deductions. The budget bill continues to fund a statewide property tax relief program that now takes about 16 percent off all property taxes. When coupled with the 10 percent homestead credit, that translates to savings of around 26 percent.

A bill the size of the budget does not contain everything I would like, but considering the fiscal restraints facing legislators going into the 2001 session, I feel this budget is a major accomplishment.

## Spending highlights from the 2001-2003 budget



## Autistic patient insurance, local government focus of Cochran legislation



REPRESENTATIVE COCHRAN ADDRESSES THE HOUSE.

Families of autistic patients will be able to receive insurance benefits soon thanks to HEA 1122. This bill, which I co-authored, requires insurance companies and HMOs to provide coverage for the treatment of pervasive neurological developmental disorders like autism.

Early detection is imperative to the correct diagnosis of autism. Without insurance policies, many parents cannot afford to give their children the necessary treatment. Studies show that more than 50 percent of young children who receive appropriate medical treatment are able to return to mainstream society and lead normal, productive lives.

Another bill to reach the Governor's desk relates to liability for members of boards, committees or other instrumentalities of government entities. This law assures that a single person cannot be held accountable in a suit unless the person alone has acted criminally or maliciously, or unless the criminal act benefitted the group member personally.

It is my hope that without the fear of being sued for decisions made within the realm of their work, this law will inspire more people to become involved in local government and their communities.

In addition to the budget and the new district boundaries, I am pleased by the many productive items of legislation that became law during this session. As always, I welcome your comments and am happy to assist you in any way that I am able.





## Charter schools and other kids' issues

After several years of debate, legislators finally agreed to pass a bill that will allow charter schools in the state of Indiana. These are independent schools that are able to design their own curriculums and control their own spending without worrying about state authority.

Under Senate Enrolled Act 165, three groups have the ability to sponsor charter schools: local school boards, Indiana's public universities and the mayor of Indianapolis. Those entities will be required to set up their own criteria for establishing the schools, and advocates are hopeful that sponsors can begin accepting

applications from interested parties before the end of this year.

### **New kindergarten date**

Children who turn five years of age by July 1 will be able to attend kindergarten classes that fall through a provision included in the state budget. Previously, a child had to be five by June 1.

### **Principal evaluations**

Local schools will be able to access materials that provide instruction on resolving conflicts in the classroom, thanks to House Enrolled Act 1971. The same bill also enables school principals to be evaluated on criteria apart from student scores on the ISTEP exam.

## License branch improvements underway

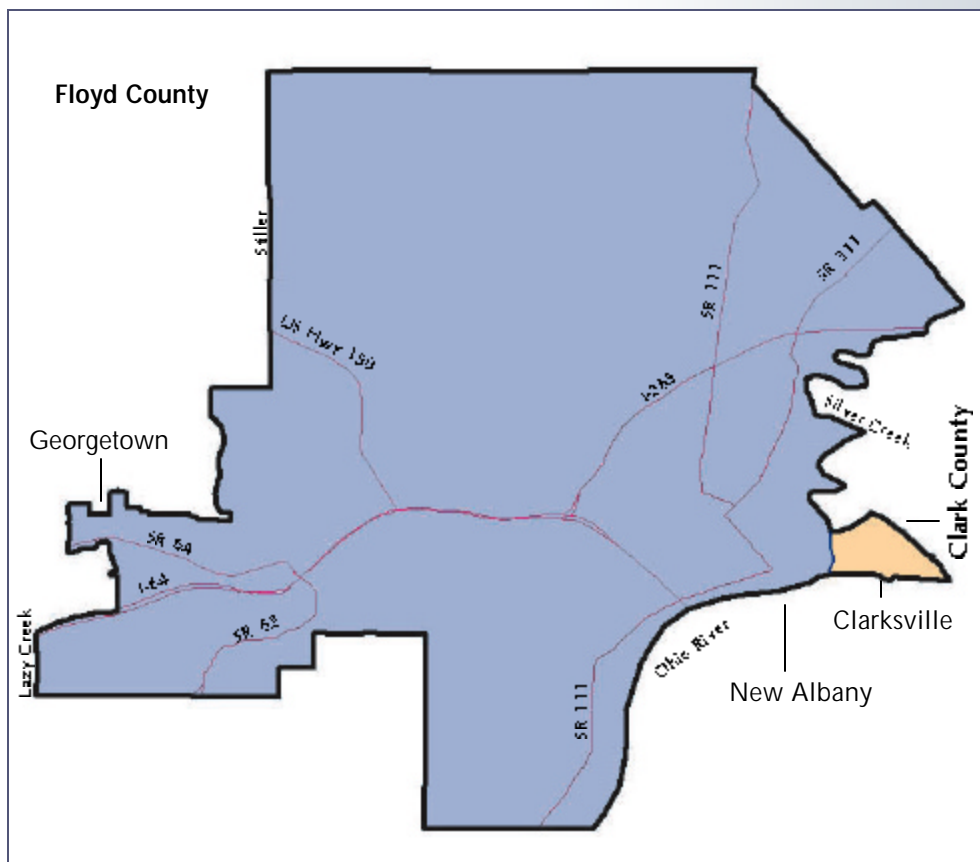
Patrons and employees of license branches will be pleased with changes enacted by the Legislature this year. Those changes should make the process of going to the license branch more efficient.



REPRESENTATIVE COCHRAN DISCUSSES LEGISLATION WITH REPRESENTATIVE SUSAN CROSBY (D - ROACHDALE).

House Enrolled Act 1170 contains the following changes: Drivers will be able to renew their licenses through the mail and over the Internet, and will be able to register their vehicles in any county. Vehicle registration deadlines will be staggered and come twice a month to reduce lines. Additionally, the state will have to conduct a public hearing before closing any license branch.

## The new look of District 72



During this year's session you may have heard about redistricting in the news. After each census, the Indiana General Assembly is required by law to redraw House, Senate and Congressional district boundaries according to population changes.

Each district must have 60,000 people, which means that as the population moves to or from various parts of the state, boundaries shift to reflect that change. District boundaries are very complicated, and it took months of effort and plenty of debate among legislators. In the end, however, I feel that the district lines we have drawn are as fair as possible.

For both the current members and those new to the district, I look forward to serving you. Please contact me if you have questions about the district or any other matters.

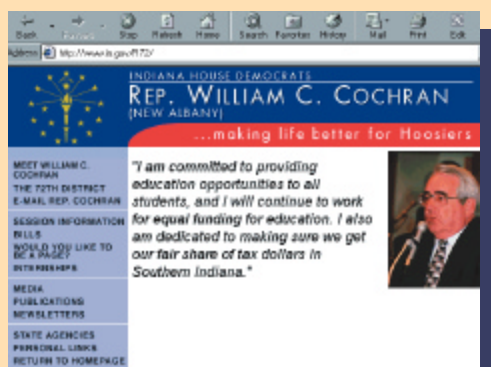


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## Privacy from telemarketers and election reform

Stay informed about these  
and other issues online with  
Representative Cochran



Web: [www.in.gov/R72](http://www.in.gov/R72)

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In 2001, lawmakers took steps to help reduce the interruption of telemarketers calling you at home. Through House Enrolled Act 1222, you will be able to have your name placed on a do-not-call list that will **prohibit most solicitors from contacting you via the telephone**. To be placed on the list, contact the Office of the Indiana Attorney General about the **Telephone Privacy List at 1-888-834-9969**.

In the wake of the confusion that took place in the presidential election in Florida last fall, lawmakers in Indiana moved quickly to enact reforms that will change the way we handle elections here.

Senate Enrolled Act 268 gives counties the ability to enter into agreements with the state to purchase **upgraded voting equipment**. This allows counties to take

advantage of the state's ability to purchase large amounts of equipment and materials at discounted prices. Funds contained in the biennial state budget will help the state provide 50 percent matching grants to further reduce those costs. The same legislation also **eliminates the use of punch-card voting** in future elections.

Through provisions contained in House Enrolled Act 1510, the state has moved closer to improving voter registration in Indiana. The Indiana Election Division will make a **voter registration form available on the Internet** that people can download, fill out and mail in to be processed. The legislation also strives to update lists of eligible voters by removing names of people who are deceased and convicted felons who are in prison.